

Conservation of the Orangutan

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'Orangutans' is derived from the Indonesian or Malay term 'orang hutan' meaning 'person of the forest'. They are two species of great apes with long arms and reddish-brown hair and the only existing species in the genus Pongo and Ponginae. It is the official state animal of Sabah, Malaysia and the animal is native to Indonesia and Malaysia, found only in rainforests of Sumatra and Borneo. They spend nearly all their time in trees, creating new nests every day. They are remarkably intelligent and solitary animals. Wild orangutans are acknowledged to visit human-run facilities for young orphaned orangutans released from illegal captivity, interacting with the orphans and helping them adjust to returning to the wild. Both the Borneo and Sumatran species of orangutans are endangered according to the IUCN Red List of Mammals. Both are listed in Appendix I of CITES. There are about 50,000 orangutans in the Bornean wild and only about 7,000 Sumatran species left. The chief reason for the reduction is orangutan habitat destruction due to logging, mining and forest fires. Much of the above activity is illegal, taking place in national parks restricted from loggers, miners and plantation development. There is also the trapping of baby orangutans for sale as pets; their mothers are usually killed during the trapping. However, most plantation workers are trained to gently deal with and treat orangutans as they come across them. Video 3 of WebTv illustrates this. Most oil palm and other plantations are only farmed on land already segregated for agricultural use, contrary to claims from certain NGOs. Indonesia has a few major conservation centers including those at Tanjung Puting in Central Kalimantan, Kutai in East Kalimantan, Gunung Palung in West Kalimantan, and Gunung Leuser in Aceh and North Sumatera. In Malaysia, conservation areas include Semenggok in Sarawak, and Sepilok near Sandakan in Sabah.